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BIOGRAPHIC

Two "Think Tankers": Carl Kaysen and Herman Kahn

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Talk of world power, and for most people the measure is weapons. But perhaps another index, equally important if less coercive, is the proportion of a nation's resources dedicated to thought. In the United States, contemplation has become something of a passion. Probably never before in history has a society paid so many men purely and simply to think.

Officially, the newly devised centers of intellect are called "institutes." Colloquially, they're referred to as "think tanks"—places where men with superior minds sit around, in rather undisciplined fashion, doing virtually nothing but stimulating other men with equally superior minds.

Expectably, the result is often banal, but with some frequency thoughts of considerable significance emerge. Only a society with wealth to spare could finance so many thinkers in reflection so distant from the execution of policy. However one may criticize America's actions, one must marvel at the effort being put into her thought.

From coast to coast there are institutes, each functioning in the particular domain that it has carved out for itself. With the reputation it has built as its chief asset each seeks its financing, which is normally forthcoming from agencies of government, individuals or private organizations dedicated to or operating in the area of its interests. In California there's the Institute for the Study of Democratic Institutions, on guard against flaws in the system of government. Washington has its Institute of Policy Studies, in search of fresh aims and methods for revolutionizing society from the left. In Chicago there is the Adlai E. Stevenson Institute, anxious to assert the intellectual stature of the Midwest by the contemplation of great international issues. Every institute prides itself on its independence of spirit and devotion to truth. Every one is hopeful of finding within its embrace a latter-day Marx or Adam Smith or Clausewitz, someone who will change the face of the world through the force of an idea.

Granddaddy of the institutes and still the most prestigious is the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Though it was established almost 40 years ago, well before the days of superpowers, it was nonetheless the product of America's march to world leadership. Its founder, the remarkable Abraham Flexner, had become much troubled by the decline of Germany's magnificent universities, and to some degree those of England and France, after the exhausting experience of World War I. Though not a professional scholar himself, he was a learned man who had spent a career encouraging the application of rigorous intellectual standards to American education. Then in his sixties, he believed it was imperative for the United States to begin taking a leading role in the encouragement of scholarship. In the late 1920s he conveyed this notion to Louis Bamberger and his sister, Mrs. Felix Fuld, department store heirs, who were looking for a productive way to dispose of their fortunes. Bamberger and Mrs. Fuld consented to give Flexner $5 million as a start on the undertaking. Flexner took the money and set about organizing what to this day remains a gem in the tapestry of Western civilization.

In his autobiography Flexner writes that he deliberately laid aside the question, "What use can be made of the result of this investigation?" His interest was in thought, undefiled by concern for practical ends. In establishing the Institute he was unabashedly aristocratic in his methods. His aim was to provide the facilities for only the very best thinkers to pursue their diverse goals. His institute, he said, would be "small and plastic . . . a haven where scholars and scientists could regard the world and its phenomena as their laboratory, without being carried off in the maelstrom of the immediate; it should be simple, comfortable, quiet without being monastic or remote; it should be afraid of no issue." Flexner did not abjure the training of younger men, but his interest was in an elite of mature students, already competent in their fields, who could profit by association with the masters without being a distraction to them. On a quiet field not far from Princeton University Flexner built his Institute, and to it he invited some of the best minds on earth.

Intellectuals' Refuge

Flexner was even more prophetic than he knew, for hardly was the Institute founded than the Nazi holocaust engulfed Germany, imposing on the United States new challenges and opportunities in the field of the intellect. In the ensuing years, brilliant names in scholarship found their home at the Institute for Advanced Study. Most notable was the great Albert Einstein, whose presence alone sufficed to establish it in the front rank among scholarly organizations. Einstein was followed by Professor Herman Weyl, a renowned mathematician from Göttingen, and Professor John von Neumann, a Hungarian mathematician of much promise, then teaching at the University of Berlin. Among the celebrated humanists who joined them in the first years of the Institute were Professor Ernst Herzfeld, a specialist on the ancient East, and Professor Erwin Panofsky of the University of Hamburg, an art historian. Flexner, of course, did not limit his search to Germany but ranged widely throughout Europe, the United States and elsewhere in the world. Even as an infant institution, the Institute for Advanced Study met Flexner's high ambition of serving as a focus for the world's most refined studies.

Nor has the Institute ever really departed from Flexner's conception. The Institute, for example, retains his preference for theoretical undertakings, if only because they require a lesser degree of organization and a smaller outlay of capital than experimental work. It also continues to seek out scholars internationally. Flexner himself re-

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tired in 1939, to be succeeded by the president of Swarthmore College, Frank Aydelotte. In 1947 the brilliant physicist Robert Oppenheimer became director. Oppenheimer, in turn, was succeeded in 1966 by Carl Kaysen, a Harvard economist. A new generation has now taken over, but Flexner's planning has proved so sound that with only modest modifications the Institute remains what its founder made it in its earliest years.

The Institute is divided into three schools—Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Historical Studies. It currently has in residence 22 professors, plus four classified as "emeritus." In addition, it entertains about 100 visiting specialists, formally called "members," whose appointments normally last a year but frequently run longer. Everyone works at his own pace on whatever pleases him, with, in Flexner's words, "no duties, only opportunities." Over the years the bulk of the work has been in pure mathematics and theoretical science, but important contributions have been made in Greek archeology and epigraphy, philosophy and philology, Roman and medieval history, the history of art and of the sciences and even in modern history and economics. The only requirement upon participants is that all live on the premises, for the Institute continues to think of itself, despite the diverse interests it encourages, as a single community of scholarship.

Toward the Social Sciences

"We like to keep our group," said Carl Kaysen, the current director, "about half senior people, half young visitors still in the stage of intellectual apprenticeship. We follow this pattern particularly in mathematics and physics, less in the historical school, where the tradition of individual work is more tenacious. The younger people have so much to learn from the older ones, and we find that there is usually an interaction. And we have the feeling that the interaction, without being in any sense formal, is fruitful to both sides."

Kaysen does not describe himself in his new post either as an innovator or as a reformer, but neither does he have a rigid attachment to the status quo. He is looking actively, for example, for thinkers in theoretical physics, in the belief that for some years the Institute's achievements have tended to slip in this field. More important, he intends to turn greater attention to the social sciences, which is perhaps not surprising for a man who served as a member of President Kennedy's White House staff. Kaysen is quick to point out that he does not mean the Institute to become a center of applied research. But he feels that social problems, no less than problems in history or math, lend themselves to thoughtful analysis and research. He says that in the future he will be looking for the brilliant thinkers in such fields as economics, government, social psychology and cultural anthropology. He does not feel that the Institute would be departing from its intellectual traditions to focus some of its energy on the problems generated by man in society.

Perhaps Kaysen's most immediate challenge is to chart the financial future of the Institute. The Institute continues to live chiefly on the income from the original Fuld-Bamberger gift. Thanks to a rising stock market, its value has multiplied several times over, but so have expenses and needs. From its modest beginnings the Institute has grown by a kind of Parkinson's law to its present size. At the same time, academic salaries—which the Institute must match or exceed—have also risen. Kaysen says that the Institute can no longer be considered a wealthy organization. As a consequence, he has before him the option of cutting back its ambitions or finding new money.

Kaysen admits that the Institute already relies heavily on the government for assistance, although the channels from Washington to Princeton are indirect. About half the visitors to the Institute come on federal grants—including some from the Army, the Navy and other security agencies. Kaysen asserts he has no fear that the Institute will be compromised by this reliance on the government.

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The permanent faculty passes carefully on the proposals of all candidates to the Institute. Since the Institute does not assign research projects of its own, there is scant possibility, Kaysen says, of its becoming a handmaiden to the government for dubious intellectual undertakings. Kaysen insists that the Institute's integrity is not threatened by any flow of federal funds.

But Kaysen's need for funding illustrates an important dilemma for American intellectual life. If the Institute for Advanced Study—with a noble tradition dating back some 40 years and names like Einstein and von Neumann and Kennan in its background—must contemplate the consequences of reliance on the government, then the problem in other quarters is evidently worse. Few are the institutes that are financially self-sustaining, whatever the tax benefits may be to donors. Many institutes see a threat in looking increasingly to the government for support. The government, after all, is not impervious to the advantages of thought and recognizes it as a valid index of power. It is for its own purposes that the government serves as the "think tank's" willing financier.

A Different Kind of Community

Herman Kahn, director of the Hudson Institute, also discerns a danger in excessive dependence on the government, though his "think tank," for all practical purposes, exists to serve it. Hudson obtains some 80 percent of its funds from federal contracts, most of them military. Throughout its brief history, Hudson's relations with the government have been satisfactory. No official, Kahn says, has ever insisted on a certain conclusion as a precondition to contracting for research on a problem. Nor has any agency, he maintains, ever complained officially of the injustice of a conclusion, however critical or at variance with its own preconceptions. Still, Kahn argues, there is a risk to depending so heavily on the government—or, for that matter, any other single organization—for your very survival. Though the organization is non-profit, Kahn would consider Hudson more viable if it received a greater proportion of its work from non-federal sources.

In many ways, the Hudson Institute is the very antithesis of the Institute for Advanced Study. Kahn's Institute is as pragmatic in its concerns as Kaysen's is abstract. It is not likely to invite brilliant scholars to pursue their own peculiar interests, but normally hires practical-minded employees to solve problems submitted to it under contract. It does not exist chiefly on an endowment but depends on its own ability to attract "think" business. It emerged not out of the decline of European scholarship following World War I but directly out of the rise of American power following World War II. As "think tanks," these two institutions play profoundly different roles in American society.

Yet there is a kinship between them. They both proceed from the principle, first proffered by Flexner in founding the Institute for Advanced Study, that intelligent men somehow are more productive working in an intellectual community than working separately. They both utilize the device of the seminar as a means of promoting interaction and generating intellectual sparks. They both rely heavily on a bucolic setting as a stimulant to thought. They both assume a real but limited responsibility for teaching. It is no coincidence that Carl Kaysen is a "fellow member"

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of the Hudson Institute. Whatever the contrast in aims, Hudson probably would not exist—at least in its present form—had not the Institute for Advanced Study been established before it.

Kahn, however, traces Hudson's descent from the Rand Corporation, the celebrated "think tank" founded in 1946 to complement the research and development programs of the Air Force. A mathematician and physicist by training, Kahn was a key figure in the Rand operation. In his official capacity there he wrote the book *On Thermonuclear War* which made him famous—and to some people infamous. The book dealt dispassionately with the prospect of a conflict in which nuclear bombs fell on every major American city and killed millions of persons. Kahn took the position that such a war need not mean the end of civilization in this country. The purpose of his study, he argued, was not to justify such a war but simply to bring some rational consideration to its contingency. Nonetheless he was denounced from many quarters as a warmonger, as if he personally had put thermonuclear war into the realm of the conceivable. The book, however, won enough esteem for him to set out on his own in 1961, and to establish, in an abandoned mental hospital at Croton-on-Hudson, 30 miles from New York, his own institute.

Face to face, Kahn scarcely conveys the impression of a Dr. Strangelove, who, it has been said, was actually patterned after him. He is a rather jovial man, of enormous girth, weighing perhaps 300 pounds or more. Hardly a soul calls him anything but Herman. He speaks extremely rapidly, with a New York accent and a slur that often render his speech unintelligible. The style has exposed him to the charge of being glib rather than profound, clever rather than wise. Kahn himself makes no great personal claims. He calls himself, a bit facetiously, "an average, everyday, middle-class American male," and admits that the reputation of an evil exponent of nuclear war disturbs him because it upsets his teen-age children! If anything, Kahn thinks of himself as something of a liberal, with a particular understanding of national security problems and a particular sympathy toward those responsible for the nation's defense. These sentiments represent the spirit of the Hudson Institute, for the Institute is, in very large measure, an extension of Herman Kahn himself.

Ideologues and Innovators

Kahn has on the Hudson payroll some 35 professional staff members. A few have PhDs but most, including Herman himself, do not. They were hired because of some special expertise or demonstrated capacity for analysis and research. In one office is a Russian linguist, in another a military operations expert, in a third a psychologist, in a fourth a mathematician, in a fifth a population specialist. There are, among them, right-wingers and left-wingers, for Kahn maintains that ideologues frequently make the best thinkers on policy questions. On the whole the staff functions casually—though frequently under pressure to finish this or that assignment—and without consciousness of class or status. For their various contributions to Hudson studies the senior professionals are paid from $14,000 to $28,000 a year. Evidence suggests that they find their work exciting and feel as if they are doing something genuinely constructive for society.

Some skeptics question the value of the applied research that Hudson and similar "think tanks" do, but Kahn finds that the contracts keep coming in. This year his budget is approaching $1.5 million. Perhaps he is proudest of the project commissioned by the government of Colombia, in which the Institute proposed construction of a waterway from the Caribbean to the Pacific through the Choco Valley. He also takes satisfaction in Hudson's recommendations to the city of New York to develop a community on Welfare Island in the East River. Kahn notes with pleasure that the Institute frequently turns down contracts, particularly from private industry, when the problem involved is not sufficiently general in nature. Along with some of the other staff members he, personally, obviously has most fun with the "futures program," financed largely by private corporations and foundations, in which gazing into a crystal ball has been replaced by the careful contriving of "scenarios" of coming events. Kahn's most recent book, *The Year 2000*, written with his colleague Anthony J. Wiener, has evoked a wide range of emotions—including much skepticism—since it was published late last year.

Thinking Ahead

But the bread-and-butter of Hudson has been and is likely to remain studies on national defense. "We don't use Hudson for the fire brigade, for the crisis of the moment," said a Defense Department official. "We use them for things a year or several years in the future." Recently the Institute had in progress work, among dozens of others, on papers with such titles as "New Perspectives on Civil Defense," "A Concept for NATO" and "A Small Nuclear War in the Pacific Leads to a Developed World United by Economic Controls." These papers, when completed, are open to public examination. Hudson also does classified work, screened from the eyes of all but a few officials in the Pentagon. Kahn has just enough of the academician in him to be apologetic about producing classified papers—but he is not apologetic about the need for clear thinking in the conduct of national security affairs.

"With weapons systems changing every five years, with society changing more and more rapidly, the need for the kind of work we do will go on for the foreseeable future," Kahn said. "New problems keep coming up. Normally we don't deal with the weapons themselves or with new technology, but we do deal with the problems they generate—social, organizational, morale, problems of destruction and reconstruction. I guess we do a pretty good job, because people pay attention to us."

There seems little question that people in America do pay attention to the "think tanks." Certainly there remains a wide gap between the policy-maker and the intellectual, whether he is studying Greek epigraphy or nuclear weaponry. But neither Kaysen nor Kahn maintains that it should be otherwise. The intellectual has his role. It is not a dramatic one, however important it may be. Significantly, American society is willing to support him and to listen to his message. The voice of the intellectual may be soft, but in chorus it can be enough to shout down the fanatic. However one may interpret American conduct, the proliferation of "think tanks" must certainly be a favorable indication in assessing the country's prospects for the future. That a nation dedicates substantial resources to the cultivation of reason must be a useful index of power.